rehabilitation there, the following measures were taken by Government:

(i) special counters were set up in select Passport Offices in India to enable expeditious issue of passports to those who had returned on Emergency Certifictes;

(ii) the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi and Consulate General in Dubai maintained close and continuous contact with the local authorities to ensure that the returnees did not have any restrictions placed on their re-entry into the UAE; and

(iii) the mandatory requirement of attestation of employment visas by the Indian Embassy/Consulate in the UAE was suspended by the Ministry of Labour.

Impact of nuclear tests on relations with neighbouring countries

2490. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the nuclear tests conducted by India recently will have any impact on Indo-Pak talks;

(b) if so, whether the relations between the neighbouring countries have been affected at large;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the steps Government have taken to strengthen relations with the neighbouring countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMAN VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) India desires to establish peaceful and friendly ties under stable structure of cooperation with Pakistan. This has been reiterated in Prime Minister's letter dated 14 June, 1998 to the Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. In his response, the Pakistan Prime Minister has indicated his willingness to discuss all issues of mutual concern with our Prime Minister during the forthcoming SAARC Sumit in Colombo. Government will continue to pursue its endeavours to engage in a substantive dialogue with Pakistan to resolve all outstanding issues.

(b) and (c) The continuation of a process of dialogue with neighbouring countries, as indicated by the recent visits to India by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the President of Maldives and the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, demonstrates that India's nuclear tests have not adversely affected our relations with neighbouring countries, with the exception of Pakistan. Some of these countries have expressed understanding of the rationale underlying India's decision to conduct the nuclear tests.

(d) Government has taken several steps to strengthen and promote closer cooperation and consultations with neighbouring countries in a variety of fields. Government has also announced a series of initiatives aimed at addressing concerns in the wake of our nuelear tests.

US Foreign policy regarding China and India

2491. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to a news-item published in the Hindustan Times, dated 18th June, 1998 captioned "Congressman Frank Pallone against linking N-tests with Kashmir-U.S. Policy comes up for criticism in both Houses of U.S. Congress";

(b) whether Senator Connie Mack also criticised the Clinton administration's policy as "irrationality of the U.S. rewarding an authoritarian China even as it sanctions democratic India"; and

(c) if so, what is Government's reaction to U.S. foreign which favours China over India as alleged by Senator Mack?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Government has reiterated that all bilateral issues between India and Pakistan are to be discussed between the two countries and that there is no role for third party intervention regarding Jammu & Kashmir.

US and China have issued a Joint Statement on South Asia. Government conveyed its reaction to the Joint Statement in the Statement of Official Spokesman issued on 27.06.1998, which categorically rejects this approach as completely unacceptable.

Transit routes through Bangladesh to North-Eastern States

2492. SHRI KHAGEN DAS: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a long pending demand for a transit route for passenger and trade through Bangladesh in Tripura and other parts of North-East;

(b) if so, what steps have been taken by Government to get the transit route opened;

(c) whether Government have taken up the matter with the Government of Bangladesh for a passage to Chittagong port; and

(d) the reaction of Government of Bangladesh to this proposal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) India has a limited transit facilaity through Bangladesh under the provisions of the India-Bangladesh Waterways Transit & Trade Protocol (IWT & TP) which has been in operation since 1972. However, Government have made repeated proposals to the Government of Bangladesh for overland transit facilities for passenger and freight traffic. Bangladesh has not agreed to these proposals.

Pak Response to the resolution adopted at P-5 meeting

2493. SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the Pakistan's response to the resolution adopted at the P-5 meeting at Geneva held in first week of June 1998 to the effect that this marked the beginning of international involvement in the Indian sub Continent and that bilsteral on issues like Kashmir needed to be supplemented by a broader multilateral process to promote durable peace in South Asia; and

(b) if so, what is Government's response to the Pak-reaction?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) Government have seen Pakistan's response to the joint communiaqe issued at the conclusion of the P-5 Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Geneva on 4 June, 1998.

(b) There is no place for any international or third party involvement of any kind whatsoever in bilateral issues between India and Pakistan. This view has been reiterated through official statements, as also in interaction with all concerned at the political and diplomatic levels. India remains firmly committed to carrying forward the process of bilateral dialogue with Pakistan to settle all outstanding issues.

Visit of High Level Team from Oman

2494. SHRI DILIP SINGH JUDEV: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether any high level team from Oman had visited India recently;
(b) if so, the prime objectives of their visit;